

# **EXHIBIT N**

Sonya Larson

LARSON



Exhibit 11

07/30/2021

Sonya Larson &lt;sonya@grubstreet.org&gt;

## Have fun at VSC!

Sonya Larson <sonya@grubstreet.org>  
 To: Dawn Dorland <dawndorland@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 16, 2016 at 3:02 PM

Hello, Dawn,

Ah-- I'm glad to say I feel such relief as well. And I apologize for the long delay in writing this note-- I was trying not to look at Grub email for my remaining weeks at VSC. But yes: let me reiterate that I value our relationship and I regret my part in these miscommunications and misunderstandings. I look forward to reading your work as well-- you obviously have such rich material to draw from.

I look forward to seeing you again with the strength of this conversation between us. Thank you again, and I hear that you're at your own residency too-- enjoy it and write like crazy!

Sincerely,  
 Sonya

Sonya Larson  
 Assistant Director, Muse Conference  
 In office Monday-Friday, 12:00-6:00pm. I check email starting at 1:00pm.



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On Thu, Jul 21, 2016 at 4:53 PM, Dawn Dorland <dawndorland@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Sonya,

Whew -- thank you. I am so relieved to get this message! I really hope that we can remain friends. Your email gives me confidence that we can.

I think we both understand by now that this particular art/life situation was convoluted by my having invited you (as a friend) to private information around my donation ahead of the donation itself. Yes, I was confused by your lack of participation in the group on fb, and that when I messaged you about it, you didn't respond (have you dbl-checked that?). Then when I emailed you later in the summer, the fact that I had to remind you about the donation seemed very strange (did you go back to those emails?). I was pretty confused, but I figured that you hadn't actually seen any of the private posts. I shrugged it off.

Then, this year, when someone asked me if my kidney donation was the inspiration for a story you had written -- and when you confirmed that my donation had sent you down a fictional path -- it felt like appropriation in the sense that, it seemed to me, you had taken something from the friendship without nurturing the friendship (my real-life gesture) itself. Does that make sense? I do really appreciate all of the positive things that you have written to me lately and said about my own donation now that we're actually talking about it. Thank you.

Heads up: Race and shame did come into play during my donation--and continue to with my LKD advocacy--and are certainly part of a fictional donation that's already in my novel about race and class, FYI. (There's some great grandiosity in the *New Yorker* article I mentioned.) And as for my NF projects, as I've said, this situation has surfaced intellectual questions that I think are useful to all fiction writers. The fb discussion -- which wasn't limited to, nor

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specifically revealing of this circumstance -- signaled that everyone is making some assumption about whether it's ok to use writers' lives as fictional material: some say it comes with the territory; others say, absolutely not. I have ideas now about how we might all proceed humanly with one another, nourishing our relationships with both writers and non-writers without sacrificing our artistic freedoms. My eventual essay won't be about this situation in its particulars but, broadly, about how we writing fiction from observation use and might acknowledge (interpersonally) material that we incorporate from other peoples' lives. I no longer think this is the case here.

Finally, I can see how my asking to read the story might have worried you that I was trying to take control (if that's what did it). I'm sorry. I do wish you'd given me the benefit of the doubt, not only because of who you know me to be, but because donating a kidney is no better practice for giving up control! Lol. But thank you for your reflection, your apology, and your regret. Asking to read the story, I was only trying to start a conversation with you -- clunkily, I see now -- about something I didn't even know was true. Curiously, you did offer to send me the story when it was ready; you definitely don't need to do that. I wish you so much success -- it sounds fantastic -- and I will happily read your work in print.

Thanks so much for taking the time to tend to this while you're on residency, Sonya. It's the mark of a true friend.

I wish you the best and look forward to giving you a hug when I see you next.

Don't forget the waterfall.

Love,  
Dawn

On Thu, Jul 21, 2016 at 1:08 PM, Sonya Larson <sonya@grubstreet.org> wrote:

Hey Dawn,

I do want to make peace, and have a few things to say. First of all, some info: I actually haven't read this Facebook discussion that you mentioned, and I don't know who was a part of it, or who wasn't. Certainly nobody is speaking as a 'proxy' for me. What I have to say I'll tell you directly.

I definitely understand how learning of my story-- and not from me-- could make you feel uncomfortable. For what it's worth, I was indeed planning to tell you about the piece-- should it ever be published-- to assure you that while it's structured around a donation, it's certainly not 'about you' or your story. But that hasn't happened, and I suppose that the would-have-done-it gesture is moot now: I feel regret that this is playing out in this way.

I myself have seen references to my own life in others' fiction, and it certainly felt weird at first. But I maintain that they have a right to write about what they want-- as do I, and as do you. I do think that non-fiction bears more responsibility, but that's not what I'm doing here, and I don't plan to. If you ever do read the story, I hope you'll see that it's not actually *\*about\** a donation-- I know close to nothing about that experience. Instead, it's about race, shame, grandiosity, addiction-- things that I'd guess are not a part of your real-life story. But they're a part of mine, for better or for worse, and this fiction-- all my fiction-- travels inevitably toward my particular struggles.

Perhaps we're talking passed one another re: art and friendship because we see their connection differently. For me, honoring another's artistic freedom *is* a gesture of friendship, and of trust. At first I read your emails as an attempt to control how or what I write-- which runs directly counter to what I value in art and what I value in friendship.

But upon reflection, I see that you're merely expressing real hurt, and for that I am truly sorry. I certainly don't want that, and I wish that I had given you a head's up earlier-- had given you that benefit of the doubt, as you say-- while somehow not compromising my work-in-progress, which is what I fear in discussing any unfinished work. Regarding our relationship, I feel frustration in hearing you say that my 'silence' on Facebook shows a lack of support. To my mind, I have told you that I support you repeatedly, and that I think so highly of you, and yet you say you're still not feeling it. I'm not sure what to do about that, but we do seem to be miscommunicating in this regard.

All this is to say that if you do, in fact, want to write about your donation, or this situation, or even about me: by all means, go ahead. To my mind, I have always encouraged you as a writer and a person, and I would not stop now, or ever.

I, too, don't want to lose our relationship. I hope that we can at least continue in a professional manner, and perhaps more.

Cheers,  
Sonya

Sonya Larson

Assistant Director, Muse Conference

In office Monday-Friday, 12:00-6:00pm. I check email starting at 1:00pm.



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On Wed, Jul 20, 2016 at 6:16 PM, Dawn Dorland <dawndorland@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Sonya,

Am I correct that you do not want to make peace? Not hearing from you sends that message; please let me know. I am concerned first and foremost to lose you as a friend - I had considered you a good friend.

I'm also concerned about the climate between us as we continue to work together and see each other at the Muse, etc.; be fellow writers in the Grub Street and other communities; and maintain a shitload of mutual friendships! As I said in my message yesterday, I'm ready to let this go, but I need to hear from you in order to mend this - it's another small courtesy that I seek.

Love,  
Dawn

Sent by telepathy

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Dawn Dorland <dawndorland@gmail.com>  
**Date:** July 19, 2016 at 4:09:54 PM PDT  
**To:** Sonya Larson <sonya@grubstreet.org>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Have fun at VSC!

Hey, Sonya - I know you're at VSC but I wanted to reach out to you bc you're important to me. I think you're aware that I moderated a discussion on fb yesterday (Sari might have been your proxy, but she hasn't confirmed that) which was in part about the disagreement we've had. Having seen so many stories now of appropriation, I'm ready to let this one (which is borderline, at best) go. The situation you've confronted me with has surfaced many intellectual questions about empathy and the humans behind our observed fictions, material that I will mull over and write about for some time. So that's good, if painful to get there. I am still surprised that you didn't care about my personal feelings as much as I would have thought; I'm bewildered about why you didn't just tell me the many times we interacted this year that you were working in this area fictionally -- I wish you'd given me the benefit of the doubt that I wouldn't interfere. I am also uncomfortable, as I've said, about your using access to info about my donation process and outcome on fb in the closed group but not supporting me in my gesture, in any way that was apparent to me, as a friend (which is why I eventually removed you from the group).

If you'd like to mend things, Sonya, please let me hear from you. I'd offer to get on the phone, which is best, but I'm having day surgery tomorrow and teaching a seminar this wknd, so email is better this time: dawndorland@gmail.com.

Be well, Sonya - I look forward to hearing from you.

Love,  
Dawn

PS I texted you this message bc I'm not sure about continuing this convo on your Grub email but I also, regrettably, accidentally texted it to Chris Castellani!!! (I had both of your cell numbers listed for you, prolly from the Muse.) I'm so sorry. He was very kind about it.

Sent by telepathy

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Dawn Dorland <dawndorland@gmail.com>  
**Date:** July 15, 2016 at 5:58:42 PM PDT  
**To:** Sonya Larson <sonya@grubstreet.org>  
**Subject:** Re: Have fun at VSC!

Dear Sonya,

That's cool, Sonya, but not an apology (for which I would have been grateful). Though you have consistently reverted to art as a defense, I have stressed that this interaction has upset me *as a friend*. You have not responded to my key question: how you thought I would feel when I eventually found out. I see you resorting to passivity as a defense, but here was a friend entrusting something to you, making herself vulnerable to you. At least, the conclusion I can draw from your responses is that I was mistaken to consider us the friends that I did.

But as for fiction, I maintain humbly that I am deserving of empathy in this situation, too. I trusted that someone with your heart & fictional muscles would see that, eventually, and hear me, which is why I bothered. I wanted no part of your story project, only to understand why you misled me, or a simple admission of a mistake if that's what - in the rearview - you could admit that it was.

But you've known what was going on in your mind for a year; I've only just caught up. I have confided the situation discreetly to several people (including writers) to make sure I wasn't reacting defensively. And despite the heartache and disappointment of your news this week, Sonya, I've ended in a strong place intellectually. And so the art-wheel turns again: If I write about it in either my current memoir project, or an essay, I'll let you know.

Dawn

Sent by telepathy

On Jul 15, 2016, at 3:18 PM, Sonya Larson <sonya@grubstreet.org> wrote:

Hi Dawn,

I'm sorry that you feel this way-- that is not my intention. I want you to know that I absolutely do support your donation; I think it's tremendous. Before this email exchange, I hadn't considered that my individual vocal support (or absence of it) was of much significance. And I hadn't thought of myself as in a position to endorse or not endorse-- I was simply interested to read whatever updates came across my feed. But if you have indeed been wondering about my support, I can totally see how my 'silence' could make you feel that something is 'off.' That is certainly not my intent.

As for my story, I disagree that not telling you about it while I'm working on it is somehow in the wrong. It is a work of fiction, formed wholly by my particular imagination. Thanks to you as well for the correspondence, and I wish you well in your work too.

Cheers,  
Sonya

Sonya Larson  
Assistant Director, Muse Conference  
In office Monday-Friday, 12:00-6:00pm. I check email starting at 1:00pm.



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On Tue, Jul 12, 2016 at 5:25 PM, Dawn Dorland  
<dawndorland@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Sonya,

I appreciate all of your correspondence now on this. And yes, I agree that your process of writing fiction sparked by my or anyone's donation needn't have anything to do with me or my particular situation in an artistic sense--I'm talking about what this feels like having disclosed my intent to you to donate, as a friend.

It's the interpersonal layer that feels off to me, Sonya. If you check fb I think you'll see that I msg'ed you about staying/participating in the kidney group ahead of my donation and you didn't respond. I assumed at the time that you might not have seen any of the private kidney posts; you've just confirmed that you did. I was confused about the radio silence. I wrote you an email I think last July? and you seemed not to be aware of my donation until I pointed it out. I was giving you the space to not endorse my choice if you didn't want to (I did get some strange reactions). But if you had already kicked off your fictional project at this time, well I think your behavior is a little deceptive. At least, weird. Add to that Tom Meek tagging you on fb recently with the question about the inspiration for your story; you didn't respond (though remained active). It makes me uncomfortable that we're only having this conversation because I initiated it. How would I have found out about this otherwise? Putting yourself in my shoes... to see a friend publish a story inspired by something that you did, without her really supporting the actual gesture, nor disclosing that she was working on a story inspired by your own... would that feel great to you? Upstanding? Exploitative?

Re: being deserving, I mean that I feel anyone being medically cleared to receive a kidney is deserving. There are a lot of other projections of deserving/undeserving that can be made even on those who have been medically cleared (fruitful terrain for fiction--although Larissa MacFarquahar has already done it with reporting in "The Kindest Cut"). One faces that human tendency, especially, if you participate in a nondirected donation like I did, not that I struggled with it too much.

Thanks again for the correspondence, Sonya. Let me know if you'd like to talk on the phone. Otherwise, I wish you well in your work.

Kindly,  
Dawn

Sent by telepathy

On Jul 12, 2016, at 1:01 PM, Sonya Larson <sonya@grubstreet.org>

wrote:

Hey Dawn!

Yes, I'll try not to pressure myself too much. And my memory is that I did indeed join the FB group; either way, I want to emphasize that my story is not about you or your particular gift, but about narrative possibilities I began thinking about in the context of kidney donation. So while your tremendous gift certainly prompted my imagination, I actually see the processing of writing the story as quite separate. Thus why I haven't mentioned the piece to you (or really to anyone outside of my writing group).

And I love the idea that we all deserve such gifts-- it's an idea that seems seldom entertained when people debate which organ recipients may be more "deserving" than others, and for what reasons. My doctor friends tell me, for example, that they won't perform transplant surgery on someone they suspect won't take steadfast care of the new organ. Which makes sense, I suppose, but obviously that calculus has a huge impact on who gets kidneys and who doesn't. It's all so complex and the stakes are so high-- I find it so fascinating!

Cheers,  
Sonya

Sonya Larson  
Assistant Director, Muse Conference  
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On Mon, Jul 11, 2016 at 7:10 PM, Dawn Dorland

<dawndorland@gmail.com> wrote:

Hey, girl! Have an awesome time at VSC! Try not to pressure yourself too much...

& thanks for catching me up on your kidney work. I admit, I was a little surprised to hear you'd been working on something like that since we're friends and you hadn't mentioned it (and you hadn't seemed interested in joining the fb group or interacting with my story too much--maybe I got the wrong idea there?). But of course, it's very flattering for the gesture to already be finding its expression in art. Indeed, many of your same questions are what fuel my own advocacy, which at its center is a sense that we all deserve such gifts.

Kindly,

Dawn

Sent by telepathy

On Jul 11, 2016, at 3:26 PM, Sonya Larson <[sonya@grubstreet.org](mailto:sonya@grubstreet.org)> wrote:

Hello, Dawn!

Ah, it's good to hear from you, and I apologize for the delay in responding. I've been at Warren Wilson for the last 2 weeks and am back in the real world just today! I do indeed leave for VSC on Saturday, and I am so excited and nervous. I've never done a residency before, and I guess I feel this pressure to make it super-productive or else. But it comforts me to know that you and others who have been there before say such glowing things. I will indeed say hello to these Todd and Ryan men! And I'll submit my work to the visiting writers too-- I haven't known what to expect, based on the few things I know about that process. But what you say here is very encouraging.

And I have indeed been writing a story about a woman who receives a kidney, partially inspired by how my imagination took off after learning of your own tremendous donation. What got me thinking was this question: what would happen if the recipient of such a life-saving gift wasn't particularly grateful to get it (due to ongoing shame, pride, anger, etc.)? Or couldn't express gratitude, or didn't want to? In other words, how does a person adequately thank someone for literally giving her life? How does one even begin to express that? I have no idea, but I started writing a scene of a kidney recipient at Target, shopping for a gift for her donor that might somehow convey all her feelings. And I've been working on the story from there. I find these questions so fascinating, and no doubt you've encountered them in real life yourself. I hope it doesn't feel too weird for your gift to have inspired works of art, but after I heard your story, I found myself captivated by other kidney donation stories and went to learn more. What a tremendous world it is-- encapsulating so many high-stakes questions of life and death, giving and receiving, feeling "deserving" or "undeserving," and the connections deepened and complicated among all the people involved.

LARSON

At any rate, I'm still working on the story and don't feel quite ready to show the full thing to people, but I'd be happy to send it once it's finished. Thank you for asking. And have a wonderful time at Ragdale-- I hear such great things about that place too! May your write your butt off!

Cheers,  
Sonya

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On Thu, Jun 30, 2016 at 9:56 AM, Dawn Dorland <dawndorland@gmail.com>  
wrote:

Dear Sonya,

I just remembered that you'll be off soon to VSC! Have such a wonderful time, stay focused, and swim in the waterfall. Please say hi to Todd, a dapper gentleman on the grounds, for me, and Ryan the writing director.

There was one other tip I thought of for you and didn't have time to share at the Muse: you should *definitely* submit work to the visiting poets and writers. My meetings with the couple of folks who came through there, most of whom I'd never heard of, were transformative. I'm still talking about it.

Hey, I heard you wrote a kidney donation story. Cool! Can I read it?

Wishing you a wonderful residency, Sonya! Congratulations again. Think of me from time to time working away alongside you at Ragdale (July-Aug)~

Kindly,  
long lost,  
Dawn